

FINAL

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WETLANDS RECOVERY PROJECT BOARD OF GOVERNORS MEETING MINUTES

**OCTOBER 20, 2000
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**

1. Meeting attendees:

- Arthur Baggett, State Water Resources Control Board
- Wayne Baglin, San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Helen Flach (representing Jeffrey Vonk), Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Doug Gibson (representing Terry Tamminen), Public Advisory Committee
- Jaime Kooser (representing Peter Douglas), California Coastal Commission
- John Lormon, California Coastal Conservancy
- Chuck Raysbrook (representing Robert Hight), California Department of Fish and Game
- Debbie Smith (representing Marilyn Lyon), Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Jim Slawson, National Marine Fisheries Service
- Michael Sweeney (representing Mary Nichols), California Resources Agency
- Paul Thayer, State Lands Commission
- Steve Weisberg, Science Advisory Panel
- Nancy Woo (representing Felicia Marcus), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Mary Wright, California Department of Parks and Recreation
- Dan Young (representing Peter Madsen), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Not represented at meeting:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- California Environmental Protection Agency
- Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board

2. Mission Bay – A brief retrospective

Donna Frye, San Diego Pollution Prevention Manager from the Center for Marine Conservation gave the Board a brief retrospective on the history of Mission Bay. When Cabrillo discovered the bay in 1542, he named the large salt marsh “false bay.” In 1852, a dike was built on the south side of the bay, separating it from the San Diego River. In 1944, the City proposed developing Mission Bay into a tourist area and that began a major transformation of the salt marsh. Massive dredging of the marsh created a system of islands and peninsulas and a bay. At the time, the project was hailed as transforming a useless marsh into a public benefit.

Today, Mission Bay supports a variety of recreational uses and a small amount of remnant salt marsh. Water quality has become a major concern that threatens the bay’s recreational value, and thus its economic value. Parts of the bay have been closed due to poor water quality as many as

315 days in a single year. There are opportunities for wetland restoration, enhancement and creation projects around Mission Bay and its watershed that could provide significant habitat and water quality benefits.

3. Regional Plan Workshop Summary and Guidance from Board

Paul Michel (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) discussed the need for a Regional Plan to outline a longer-term strategy for focusing the WRP's efforts and balancing its multiple goals. As part of the WRP Symposium, a facilitated workshop was held the previous day to discuss the WRP's regional goals and related issues.

Alana Knaster, facilitator for the Regional Plan Workshop, provided a summary of the workshop for the Board. The workshop brought together people working on coastal wetlands and coastal watersheds in many different facets from throughout the Southern California region, and challenged them to look at what priorities we should set to guide our use of limited resources over the next five years. Regional goals identified for coastal wetlands and coastal watersheds included:

- Restore ecological functions
- Restore historic/natural diversity and abundance based on potential carrying capacity
- Improve water quality
- Promote public education and other public benefits
- Implement system for data acquisition and management

Many of the workshop participants stressed the need to give a high priority to acquisition and other land protection strategies because Southern California has suffered extensive wetlands losses and faces enormous development pressures. Acquisition now can preserve options for future restoration. Criteria identified for prioritizing acquisition projects included:

- Immediacy of threat
- Linkages – buffers, upland, nexus with the watershed, species connectivity benefits
- Sustainability
- Ease of completion and geographic equity.

Symposium participants were asked to consider what the WRP's regional goals for biodiversity and species recovery should be. Participants suggested that diversity be approached at various scales, such as landscape, habitat, and species. There was general agreement that, for the most part, the WRP should focus restoration planning at the landscape and habitat level, and that species diversity and recovery would follow from this. The need for multiple species planning was strongly emphasized.

The challenge of setting clear goals and keeping efforts focused as the WRP begins moving up into coastal watersheds was one of the main topics discussed at the workshop. Participants recommended several priorities for guiding our work in watersheds:

- Watersheds need to be addressed on an individual basis within a regional context

- Watershed impacts on coastal wetlands should be a priority
- Water quality should be both a regional goal and a functional measure of ecosystem health
- Consider Educational value
- Infrastructure benefits – a functioning watershed will not need as much infrastructure

Public benefits such as access and recreation were also discussed in relation to the WRP's overarching goals. Participants agreed that public access was needed to help build the support necessary to sustain the WRP's efforts, but that access should be creatively designed to minimize biological impacts and maximize educational benefits.

Governing Board Discussion

Mary Wright reported that her group stated a strong interest in the associated public benefits of wetlands projects. This included benefits such as public access that contribute to building a broad-based constituency, but also public benefits, such as recreation, that simply contribute to quality of life.

Jim Slawson reported that his group viewed education as an up-front necessity for get funding and support for wetlands projects.

Paul Michel stated that everything we are trying to accomplish is a balancing act – whether it is between acquisition and restoration, wetlands and watersheds, planning and education, or any other of a multitude of benefits. He asked the Board if there is anything that the WRP should be doing to help us make the right choices in order to keep these goals balanced, or is our work really opportunity driven.

Mike Sweeney noted that restoring ecological functions with a focus on coastal wetlands and acquisition as a high priority seemed to be the summary of the workshop discussion. He added that ultimately science should guide our choices.

Helen Flach seconded the need for science to drive how we restore projects. She stressed that although mitigation may be a tool for achieving restoration, it should not drive our decisions.

Wayne Baglin expressed concern about the WRP moving into the coastal watersheds because it could sap our money very quickly. He would like to see the WRP focus its efforts on coastal wetlands. Mr. Baglin also expressed concern about focusing all of our educational efforts on kids. We can not afford to wait for a generation of adults to grow up before making changes; therefore, we need to target education at adults. He also stressed the need to have wetland- and watershed-specific education tools.

Mary Wright commented that the most effective education is interpretive interactions with nature. Famosa Slough is a great example of this. Famosa Slough was previously an encampment for the homeless, and was not seen as a community asset. Now there are trails being built and restoration underway, and the wetland has become a touchstone for the local community. She

stressed that recreation can provide a more concrete education experience than reading a brochure.

Doug Gibson commented that the County task forces present the best avenue for getting wetlands and watershed educational tools out to the communities, and the WRP should empower the task forces to take this issue on. He agrees that we need to target educational efforts to both kids and adults.

John Lormon commented that from the Coastal Conservancy's perspective the WRP needs to remain flexible enough to act on opportunities when they arise. It is not a choice between implementing a program and an opportunistic approach – it is a balance of the two.

Debbie Smith stated that we all agree about the importance of coastal wetlands, but urged that this is also the time to focus on some of our inland watersheds that are threatened by continued urban development. Southern California has suffered extensive losses of coastal wetlands because we did not protect them years ago. She urged the WRP not to make the same mistake in the coastal watersheds.

Mike Sweeney seconded that point. The WRP's main focus may be in coastal wetlands, but that should not be to the exclusion of coastal watersheds.

Helen Flach informed the Board and audience that nonprofit grants are currently available through the NRCS for developing watershed educational materials.

Paul Michel then posed another question for the Board to consider: Given that most workshop participants saw education as a high priority, should the WRP be expending project funds on education?

Mary Wright responded that education should be a component of the projects that the WRP funds, but that the WRP should not necessarily fund strictly education projects. Education should be seen as a multi-part activity that includes constituency building and interpretive programs on site.

Jaime Kooser seconded the position that education should be a component of WRP projects, but that the WRP should not fund strictly education projects. She added that education is a theme that permeates all of the WRP's work.

John Lormon agreed that the benefits of education for sustaining the WRP's work are fairly clear. He pointed out that the Coastal Conservancy does not have a specific statutory authority to undertake education projects, but it is not necessarily prohibited from funding education programs.

Doug Gibson commented that the process of getting projects developed and completed is in and of itself an educational process for the public.

As discussed above, workshop participants repeatedly emphasized that acquisition should be a high priority for the WRP. Paul Michel asked Board members to consider some of the implications of the WRP adopting an acquisition focus such as: 1) Would we be overlooking restoration needs? 2) What about other land protection measures? 3) Is the skill set of the agencies involved right for an acquisition focus (most agencies on WRP are more focused on restoration)? 4) Acquisition requires large amounts of money. 5) Acquisitions are often opportunity driven and hard to plan use of funding.

Steve Weisberg commented that question of acquisition versus restoration is not a policy question, but an implementation strategy. This question will get answered when we answer the question of how do we best achieve our goals. He felt that the question of whether to focus on acquisition or restoration was not really a question for the Governing Board and might be better addressed by the Science Advisory Panel.

Michael Sweeney stated that if the number one goal is to restore ecological function, then acquisition should be used as a tool towards this goal. Education is also a tool in terms of creating and leveraging opportunities.

Paul Thayer pointed out that if one of the criteria for prioritizing projects is imminent threat, this will guide the WRP towards acquisition in certain cases. He advised that the Board leave it to staff to decide when acquisition is an appropriate tool to use.

Wayne Baglin commented that the WRP should pursue those projects that move towards wetlands recovery rather than simply public ownership of degraded property. If we acquire property, it should be property with functioning wetlands or property where there is a possibility of implementing a sustainable, feasible restoration project.

John Lormon commented that there is a constant tension between acquiring property that is threatened and acquiring property that best meets our goals but may not be as threatened. It is part of the WRP balancing act. The opportunity to acquire a limited resource must be given a high priority when it arises, and this needs to be considered part of the recovery process.

Dan Young informed the group that the Army Corps of Engineers does have a policy to focus on restoration, not on acquisition. For this reason, the ACOE tends to depend on local sponsors to undertake the acquisition portion of a project as part of their project cost-share.

Debbie Smith pointed out that while acquisition may be a top priority for coastal wetlands, different priorities may need to be spelled out for the coastal watersheds.

4. Wetlands Managers Group Report

Paul Michel, chair of the Wetlands Managers Group, gave a brief report to the Board on project activities. He referred them to the update on projects for information on the status of implementing this year's Work Plan.

Mr. Michel reported that in response to a suggestion at the last Governing Board meeting, he and Bill Ahern and Melanie Denninger of the Coastal Conservancy had made a presentation about the WRP to the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB). Staff at the WCB were very excited about the potential to work together on wetlands projects and offered suggestions on how to streamline the process. Coastal Conservancy staff is following up on this.

At the last Governing Board meeting, the Board also asked the WMG to discuss whether the WRP should change its name in order to reflect the work we are doing in watersheds. Mr. Michel explained that the WMG had decided to postpone this discussion until after the Symposium and a more detailed discussion about our regional goals, particularly in watersheds.

4. Update on *Caulerpa taxifolia* invasion of Southern California

Bob Hoffman, National Marine Fisheries Service, provided the Board with an update on the invasion of *Caulerpa taxifolia* to Southern California. Southern California has the unfortunate distinction of being the first site outside of the Mediterranean to be invaded by this strain of *Caulerpa*. It has been found so far at Agua Hedionda Lagoon and Huntington Harbor. All the infested patches at Agua Hedionda have been treated and will be monitored to verify that the treatment was successful. At Huntington Harbor, *Caulerpa* has been found in a manmade lagoon and was recently found upstream in the harbor. Biologists now need to survey the whole harbor in greater detail to identify all of the *Caulerpa* patches. Eradication methods at Huntington Harbor will be basically the same as those used at Agua Hedionda.

Mr. Hoffman stressed that the key to the success of the *Caulerpa* eradication effort is funding. There is not a single agency that has money dedicated for this effort. Work up to this point has been funded by several sources including the private power company at Agua Hedionda Lagoon, Regional Water Board, State Water Board, NMFS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Currently over \$1 million has been secured, but agency staff are not sure if this will be enough to fully address the problem.

In addition to eradication efforts at Agua Hedionda Lagoon and Huntington Harbor, there are several other steps that need to be taken. First, surveys are needed throughout the region to identify where else the algae may be. In addition, research must be done to identify eradication techniques that will work in the high energy environment of the outer coast. More public outreach is needed, particularly to the aquarium industry which is probably the original source of the problem. Additional genetics research is needed to verify that the Southern California infestations are the same strain as the Mediterranean outbreaks. This appears to be the case since they share all the same characteristics. All of these additional work tasks are estimated to cost an additional \$1 million.

Jamie Kooser asked Mr. Hoffman to describe the method of treatment. Mr. Hoffman explained that *Caulerpa* patches are isolated by placing plastic tarps over the infected area. A bleach solution is then injected under the tarps. The bleach kills everything under the tarps. He explained that there is no known effective biological control for *Caulerpa*, and bleach appears to be the most effective eradication method. He commented that one thing Southern California

agencies have learned from the problems in the Mediterranean is the need to act quickly and decisively to attack this invasive algae.

Wayne Baglin stated that everyone involved recognizes that killing the algae with bleach is a fairly drastic measure, but they feel it is necessary to control the problem.

5. Consideration and Approval of Science Advisory Panel Work Program

Steve Weisberg reviewed for the Governing Board the new roles that were adopted for the Science Advisory Panel (SAP) at the June 9, 2000 meeting:

- Develop a series of position papers
- Develop a focused research program
- Sponsor a series of scientific symposium to be held in conjunction with WRP symposia.

At that meeting, the Governing Board committed to providing the SAP with a half-time support person and made a commitment to work with the SAP to identify research funds. For its part, the SAP agreed to develop a mid-term (5-year) and short-term work agenda for the Governing Board to review and approve.

The Science Advisory Panel identified three main phases of the WRP's work that it could provide input on:

1. Prioritize wetland acquisition and restoration projects
2. Address constraints to restoration projects
3. Improve restoration, implementation and evaluation

Dr. Weisberg then elaborated on each of these three areas and identified position paper and research topic areas discussed by the Panel. Together, these outline the 5-year work agenda for the SAP.

1. Prioritizing Projects
 - a. Assist in goal setting process
 - b. Develop data infrastructure necessary to define goals and assess the extent to which goals are being met by existing wetlands
 - c. Translate goals into specific project selection criteria
 - i. multiple small projects vs. fewer large ones
 - ii. saltwater vs. freshwater wetlands
2. Addressing Constraints to Restoration Projects
 - a. Define role of marshes in public health issues:
 - i. beach bacteria
 - ii. mosquitoes
 - b. Examine role of wetlands in urban runoff control

- c. Examine effect of watershed sediment dynamics and sediment management practices on the health of coastal marshes (ground rules in removing/putting in sediment; sustainability)
 - d. Investigate effects of water level and shoreline stability on wetlands
 - i. short term – flood
 - ii. long term – sea level rise
- 3. Improving Implementation and Evaluation
 - a. Design better restoration projects
 - i. physical design
 - ii. planting techniques
 - b. Define success criteria
 - i. performance curves
 - ii. elements of monitoring program
 - c. Test region-wide monitoring program

Dr. Weisberg explained that for its first year work agenda, the SAP proposes preparation of a position paper that will support the goals setting process and development of a research program that addresses public health issues related to wetlands restoration. These were seen as the highest priorities from the 5-year work program.

Paul Thayer supported the decision to make public health issues the highest priority for the research agenda.

The Governing Board approved the Science Advisory Panel work plan as presented by Dr. Weisberg.

Michael Sweeney tabled discussion of the research funding issues until the next Governing Board meeting.

6. Board Member Comments

John Lormon suggested that when the WRP considers geographic equity issues, it also consider environmental justice issues. He urged that the WRP not forget those communities which are less economically advantaged when selecting project areas.

7. Public Comment

Patt Healy, Malibu Coastal Land Conservancy, commented that property owners in Malibu want to “see the money.” She questioned whether there is a mechanism that could be put in place for accessing money very quickly if a non-willing seller becomes a willing seller.

Joy Wolf, Director of Education at SeaWorld, stated that it heartens her to hear the WRP talking about the importance of wetlands education. She stressed that we need to get wetlands groups to collaborate with professional educators.

Mary Ann Pentis, Vernal Pool Society, commented that the most important issue she faces is cooperation with the counties and land use agencies.

Questions or comments about the meeting minutes should be directed to Trish Chapman at the Coastal Conservancy, (510) 286-0749, fax (510) 286-0470, or e-mail: tchapman@scc.ca.gov.